



**New York
Mennonite
Conference**

An area conference of
Mennonite Church USA

LIFE

In New York Mennonite Conference

Licensening of Diane Melchert

Terry Zehr

It all began with a cryptic email... "Terry, does New York Mennonite Conference ordain women? - Diane Stitt Melchert". OK, it wasn't quite that terse, and contained a bit more detail, but that was the essence. My initial response was a sort of tightening in my stomach. It may come as a surprise to you, but I really don't like complex, emotional issues, and this one had all the earmarks of a thorny agenda driven request. Honor bound by an ethic of honesty, I replied "Yes, in fact, we do."

I recognized Diane's name, but I'd never met her. After sending my reply, I quickly checked her out a bit, and was relieved to hear that Diane was known well by people that I trust. I was intrigued. She emailed me back describing her desire to be ordained and wondered if NYMC might consider working with her toward that end.

That began a process which brought us to the last Sunday in October, the day Diane Melchert was licensed toward ordination. It continues to be an interesting journey because we both entered into territory we've never encountered. First of all, it has not been our practice to credential a minister by their personal request. We aren't a "pay us \$200 and we'll send you a Certificate of Ministry" organization. Mennonite Church USA polity describes the practice of credentials for an individual coming through the request of a congregation. Since Diane isn't pastoring a congregation as such, the request didn't come through normal channels. Add to this, the fact that she lives in Oxford, England, and you can see how strange this was for us!

But NYMC has a vision statement which includes new and renewed churches and heeding the voice of the Spirit who is doing new things. It's my experience that when we come up with statements like this, that the Spirit both takes them seriously and likes to surprise us. I'd hazard a guess that NYMC wasn't really thinking of planting international churches!

We could have said "no, this doesn't fit the way we do things. Our vision is for New York state". But in talking with our Conference Minister, Gene Miller, and our Conference Moderator, Sonya Stauffer Kurtz, while we had questions, we didn't find compelling

reasons not to explore this further. So Diane and I had more email dialogue and then face to face

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Photos courtesy Sue Bush

Conference Minister Sabbatical

Gene Miller, conference minister, will be on 3 month sabbatical from his responsibilities at New York Mennonite Conference and Yorks Corners Mennonite Church from December 26, 2012 to March 26, 2013. The sabbatical will include a 3 week Jerusalem Seminar in Israel and Jordan led by Patty Shelly and Doug Miller with Mennonite college and seminary students. The sabbatical will also provide space for study, reading, spiritual direction, visiting some conference churches on Sunday mornings, rest and rejuvenation. During this period people may contact Terry Zehr, associate conference minister, the district ministers, or Sonya Stauffer Kurtz, moderator. Pray for God's blessing and refreshment on Gene and Sharon during this time.

Licensening at New Bremen



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meetings. At each step of the way, I was impressed by a couple things... One, Diane was not a maverick on an ego trip, but a woman clearly called by God who'd encountered many turns in the road that hadn't allowed this to happen previously. And two, she is deeply intelligent, spiritually sensitive, and thoroughly Anabaptist. I can say that over these last months, Diane and I have become friends who enjoy lively dialogue around the mysteries of ministry with a deep passion for the Kingdom and for the church of Jesus Christ.

Along the way, Gene, Sonya, and the Leadership Commission have been integrally involved in the process as well as Nancy Kauffman, our Denominational Minister for MC USA and Stuart Murray Williams of the Anabaptist Network in the UK.

At the licensing service Evan Zehr opened the meditation by referencing Isaiah 61:1-3, recognizing the Spirit's call on Diane's life, a call that is both a blessing, and one that is filled with challenge and trial. Gene Miller and I conducted the licensing service with questions for Diane, a prayer of blessing, and declaration of official licensing. After the congregation sang, "Prasie God From Whom All Blessings Flow," Bruce Chartrand, who had opened the service with prayer and a welcome, closed the service with a benediction and invited all to attend the reception which followed.

First Mennonite Church of New Bremen is officially Diane's 'sending church'. She is licensed toward ordination as a missionary/evangelist church planter in Oxford, England, with a multi-pronged ministry plan. A support group consisting of Evan Zehr, Connie Boshart, Bruce Chartrand, Charlotte Zehr, and I will be her primary connecting point. We will meet with her when she is in town for prayer and encouragement. Diane will also connect with Stuart Murray several times per year for counsel and support in context. Our hope is that once in awhile, Diane might get to one of our conference-wide events as well as writing for our newsletter.

I invite members of NYMC churches to pray for Diane and for her ministry. She has a lot to teach us as she ministers in a post-Christian culture. I am confident that our relationship will prove to be mutually beneficial and fruitful.

3rd Year for Rochester MVS

Roger Kurtz

The Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) unit in Rochester has begun its third year of operations, offering a new batch of volunteers the opportunity to live out their convictions through Christian service.

Beginning this fall, Dan and Stephanie Giles of Rochester are serving as Associate MVSers and as hosts for the Rochester unit from their house in the city's southwest neighborhood. They are joined by Deanna Cender of Goshen, Indiana; Kristeen Goering of Moundridge, Kansas; and Arturo Martinez of LaGrange, Georgia.

One of the goals of Rochester MVS is to bless and minister to our region by placing talented workers in service organizations and nonprofit agencies that promote peace, justice and social transformation. Recent Rochester MVSers have worked in areas like food justice, non-violence education, health care for the under-served, and legal services for low-income families. MVS volunteers work, learn, dream, and grow within a community that values Christian discipleship and spiritual development.

New York Mennonite Conference has offered important financial and moral support to the MVS unit. Please continue to pray for this program and for everyone who works with it, as another year is underway.

Serving in Rochester with MVS



Left to right: Stephanie Giles, Deanna Cender, Kristeen Goering, Arturo Martinez, Dan Giles

Dreams and Visions...

Makers of Peace

Gene Miller, Conference Minister

During the last three years as I have talked with leaders on the West Side of Buffalo, one of the key messages I have heard again and again is that we as Mennonites/Anabaptists are wanted there because of our focus on peace and reconciliation. Our Dreams and Visions 2010-2017 document states that as Anabaptists, we believe that this is the time for our message of peacemaking.

Peace does not come easily in the midst of brokenness. Yes, the angels announced the birth of Jesus with peals of "peace on earth". But it wasn't long until Herod killed many innocent boy babies.

The sermon on the mount says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God." Acts 10:36, "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

Peace is at the heart of God's mission. But there were painful times on the journey to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God.

God is calling us as Mennonites in New York state to do the hard work of making peace. It may well involve risk and suffering; we will be misunderstood. Jesus made peace "through the blood of his cross." Colossians 1:20

We start in our own homes and churches—but the world is waiting for peacemakers.

Save the Dates:

Leadership Seminar, February 1-3, Lowville Mennonite Church
Spring Delegate Assembly, April 20, Seneca Falls Community Center